The “tea and toast syndrome”

The “tea and toast syndrome” refers to malnutrition in seniors due to their lack of desire or inability to prepare and/or eat proper meals, relying instead on simple fare such as tea and toast.

The main factors that put seniors at risk for malnutrition

- Gaining or losing more than 10 pounds (4.5 kg) in the past six months
- Reporting that they skipped meals “almost every day”
- 34% of seniors are at nutritional risk with women (38%) at a greater risk than men (29%).
- 44% of people with moderate or severe disability were at nutritional risk, compared with 27% of those with no or mild disability.
- In 2008/2009, 34% of Canadians aged 65 or older (more than 4.1 million) were at nutritional risk.
- 50% of people living alone raised one’s nutritional risk, with almost half of seniors living at home alone at risk, compared to only 28% of those living with others.
- The more types of medications people use on a daily basis, the more likely they were to be at nutritional risk.

Signs and symptoms of malnutrition

- Unexplained weight loss
- Tiredness and fatigue (lack of energy)
- Muscle weakness or loss of strength
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Fainting
- Gastritis
- Peptic ulcers
- Paleness of the skin
- Poor wound healing
- Depression
- Problems with memory
- Anemia

Issues that can lead to malnutrition in seniors

- The “tea and toast syndrome”
- Seniors with bad teeth or ill-fitting dentures may have difficulty chewing and swallowing food.
- Unexplained weight loss
- Tiredness and fatigue (lack of energy)
- Muscle weakness or loss of strength
- Constipation
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Gastritis
- Peptic ulcers
- Paleness of the skin
- Poor wound healing
- Depression
- Problems with memory
- Anemia

Ways to prevent malnutrition in seniors

- Ask them what they eat and spend time with them during meals to observe their eating habits.
- Help them monitor their weight at home.
- Check their refrigerator and pantry to find out the type and quantity of food they have.
- Encourage healthy food choices for meals and snacks. Snacking on a piece of fruit or cheese, a spoonful of peanut butter or a fruit smoothie is a good way to get extra nutrients and calories between meals.
- For a nutrient-rich diet, spread peanut or other nut butters on toast and crackers; sprinkle finely chopped nuts or wheat germ on yogurt, fruit and cereal; add extra egg whites to scrambled eggs and omelettes; use whole milk; add cheese to sandwiches, vegetables, soups, rice and noodles.
- Use lemon juice, herbs and spices to flavour bland foods.
- If they have trouble chewing raw vegetables or fruit, they can juice or mince fresh produce or use canned or frozen fruits and vegetables.
- Use nutritional supplements such as multivitamins with a doctor’s approval.

Getting help

Bayshore Home Health provides assistance with grocery shopping, meal preparation and light clean-up. To find out more about the meal preparation and home care services we offer, call us at 1-877-289-3997 or email us today at clientservice@bayshore.ca.